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# No More Mother

Maureen Connelly

Ireland's Mother Machree of sentimental song no longer sits, as did American counterpart Mrs. Whistler, knitting sweaters for her grandchildren. Though silver still may shine in her hair, it may be camouflaged by Clairol. And the sweaters she no longer knits may be purchased at Shannon's Duty Free shop by daughter Deirdre and son Seamus when they make their annual visit home. Yes, I might as well say it -- Mother Machree is finally off her rocker.

For centuries, Ireland has been called Mother. As Edna O'Brien in "Mother Ireland" (1976) explains, "Ireland has always been a woman, a womb, a cave, a cow, a Rosaleen, a sow, a bride, a harlot, and, of course, the gaunt Hag of Beare." The latter refers to the subject of a 9th century poem who has become an Irish Mary Magdalene, a prototype for the virgin-mother figure and conflict that has dominated Irish literature.

Last fall in Boston, in person not in print, I was introduced to three remarkable Irish women who have made me reevaluate the following statement made by Iris Murdoch in her novel, *The Red and the Green* -- "I think being a woman is like being Irish. Everybody says you're important and nice, but you take second place all the time." In the following essay on Nobel Prize winner Mairead Corrigan Maguire, Irish parliament member, the Hon. Mary Harney, and writer Julia O'Faolain, I hope to show just why Mother Machree (as well as the Hag of Beare) are no more.



Joan Hausrath

## Mairead Corrigan Maguire

Born in Belfast on January 27, 1944, Mairead Corrigan was educated at St. Vincent's Primary School on Falls Road and Miss Gordon's Commercial College. At 14, she joined the Legion of Mary, a volunteer organization, and opened a club for handicapped children. Before founding the Northern Ireland Peace Movement with Betty Williams in 1976, she was the confidential secretary to the managing director of the Guinness Brewery. In 1980, she was elected Chairman of the Peace People organization. Aside from the Nobel Prize for Peace which she received with Betty Williams in 1977, she is the recipient of an Honorary Doctor of Letters from Yale.

On August 10, 1976, Mairead Corrigan's sister (Mrs. Jackie) Maguire was walking along Finaghy Road north in Belfast with four of her children, ages six weeks to eight years. They were struck down by a car driven by two IRA volunteers, who were being

chased by British Army soldiers. Mrs. Maguire was severely injured and three of her children were killed. The day after, Mairead Corrigan heard that Betty Williams was going to have a rally against violence. "I didn't know who she was, but I got in touch because I too wanted to speak out against violence. It has to stop; it can't go on. There must be another way," is how she explained the fact that on the day of the children's funeral, she and Betty Williams founded the Peace Movement.

After weeks on a life-support machine and several months learning how to walk again, Anne Maguire resumed her life as mother and housewife. She had another baby, worked for the movement and spoke at demonstrations. But she never could accept the fact that three of her children were dead and was convinced that they had been shot by the army (a dismantled gun was found in the backseat) not killed by the car. On January 21, 1977, the day before the inquest was to begin, after typing letters in the movement's office, she went home and slashed her wrists and throat with an electric carving knife. The next month, the movement's founders went their separate ways. And in 1981, Mairead Corrigan married her sister's widower Jackie Maguire. Together they have five children; the eldest three are from his marriage to Anne Corrigan. Maguire, her husband Jackie and their children, now live in Strangford, County Down.

In her speaking appearance in Boston and in conversations before and after with this writer, Maguire repeated that she was here "as an Irish woman to talk about Ireland where there are more problems than answers." In August of 1976, she explained -- but without referring specifically to the tragedy that struck her sister's family -- "I reacted emotionally to all the killings and to those who marched for peace. Some joined it (the Peace Movement) because they thought the IRA



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and UDA were both the causes and the problems. Within our minds we had to face this conflict... Some said the answer was in reconciliation but there is no use reconciling people and building bridges if you can't walk over those bridges. We must look at those causes."

Issues involving justice, Maguire stressed, "are the key to opening an understanding of Northern Ireland. This is far more important than sending money." Admitting that there are economic divisions across the board, she said, "we reject the use of violence; we seek nonviolent political and social change. We want our American cousins and friends to try and understand this, put away the myth that we are a violent fighting race. We have a predominant culture of nonviolence."

Maguire is convinced that "non-violence is the only way for human families to survive." The fact that alleged terrorists have come from "a culture that is non-violent," is explained by Maguire to be the result of "50 years of dominance by the Unionists," and the fact that we were "ig-

"We are a deeply spiritual people who never encouraged the gun, the bomb, the bullet. But armies couldn't control the situation. The whole injustice of it was a crucifying experience. That is why I had to do something. I thought of taking the gun, of joining the IRA. But not for Nationalism. I do not believe in Nationalism. Nationalism is the destroyer of human families. I do not belong to any nation. I belong to the world. I wouldn't give one hair for a nation. It's people who are important, not a dying and a diseased ideology."

Maguire, as mother and peace-prize recipient, chastized America, "for twice using nuclear weapons. No other country has." She then mentioned President Kennedy's visit to Ireland and his pledge "to begin again the quest for peace. We regret that day he died. Because we now look to America and see Star Wars not the New Frontier."

Admitting that ten years ago she carefully studied the IRA war theory, Maguire confessed that, "as a Christian to Christ," she asked God, "Would you kill?" And his answer to her was,

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***"You do not kill; you love your enemies."  
"It's as simple as that; we can't kill people.  
Too many people in my country are willing to  
die and too few are prepared to live."***

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nored. Thank God for the Civil Rights Movement that asked for human as well as civil rights."

What happened, said Maguire, "was that two communities too long separated by government and church started to fight because they didn't know each other. It was Bernadette Devlin who asked the British Army to come into Northern Ireland. As a pacifist I want to see peace, not armies. But with the arrival of the British Army, the IRA surfaced."

"You do not kill; you love your enemies." "It's as simple as that; we can't kill people. Too many people in my country are willing to die and too few are prepared to live."

Maguire compared the situation in her country to that of a husband and wife who have been separated for a long time. "Let them begin to sort out, to solve their own problems. And you, our cousins, must play your role. Which is to get to know us and to acknowledge our common humanity."



Joan Hausrath

**Mary Harney**

At 22, Mary Harney was chosen Auditor (president) of the College's Historical Society, the first woman to head that most prestigious debating circle. At 24, Irish Prime Minister Jack Lynch, impressed by her leadership and performance as Auditor, appointed her to the Senate. She was the youngest member ever appointed. Two years later she was elected to the Dublin City Council and, in June of 1981, she was elected to the Irish Parliament, and subsequently re-elected. Shortly after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Accord by Fitzgerald and British Prime Minister Thatcher, Harney left her party (Fianna Fail headed by Charles Haughey) and joined the Progressive Democrats headed by Des O'Malley. She still is a Member of parliament (representing a working class constituency in Dublin) as well as member of the Dublin City Council (seeking better housing and increased job opportunities).



Mary Harney's resume reads like a "Who's Who in Irish Government." And her presence in this country under the auspices of the International Visitors Program last year confirmed my belief that her star definitely is in the ascendancy. Winding up a whirlwind tour of the States that brought her to cities like Cleveland and Chicago, Seattle and San Francisco, Santa Fe and New Orleans, Washington D.C. and New York, Harney and her sister spent a weekend on the Cape with friends. That is where we discussed her work and political philosophy.

Born in Ballinasloe, County Galway, in 1954, Harney, since 1981, represents a new district in the Dublin suburbs: Tallaght/Clandalk. "This district," she explained, "comprises two new planned towns. It is the fastest growing area in Western Europe." City planners in the early 70's, she said, "foresaw the population explosion in Dublin where one-third of my country's population now lives. My district has grown from 700 in 1960 to 70,000 in 1985. And by the century's end, it is estimated that 134,000 live will there. It is only six miles from downtown Dublin and consists of semi-detached and terraced houses, ten to one acre. Private ownership is approximately 50 percent; public 45."

Unemployment, stressed Harney, not just in her district, is a problem she takes seriously. "We have a highly educated, young versatile work-force, 80 percent of whom are well trained. Yet too many can't find work. That is one of the reasons the government is offering generous tax incentives for any foreigners who want to establish businesses. Ireland offers the lowest rate of corporate tax in Europe, as well as generous grants, the biggest to industry. In the early 70's we recognized we didn't have the capital. If any firm would come into my district right now, I'd welcome it with open arms."

Though this country's unemployment figures float around 7 percent compared to 17 percent in Ireland, Harney, after visiting 10 major American cities on the invitation of our State Department, wasn't too enthusiastic about our federal assistance programs. "America," she asserted, "is a great

country to live in if you are young and healthy. But I wouldn't want to grow old here. In Europe there is a greater sense of helping the weak. I have not seen that under the Reagan administration. And as for public housing in cities like Boston, it really doesn't exist, and what does, is disgraceful."

Mary Harney is also outspoken about what Irish Americans can do to help Ireland. "First, come and visit us; spend time in our country. Second, when you're going to buy a gift, make sure it's Irish. Third, support and encourage industries to expand in Ireland."

Then, the economist in her added: "50 percent of our population is under 25; 30 percent under 15. In the past, the young emigrated; women weren't a major part of the work force. Today the young stay and the women work. America caters to so many ethnic groups, yet Irish workers aren't welcome here legally. I'd like to see 1,000 given permits to work here in the Boston area, a legal exchange perhaps. Not just to be carpenters and nannies."

Another topic Harney doesn't hesitate to speak out on is Ireland's image. "The American press just want to write about the bad things. They think there's a civil war going on and partly it's our fault. I have many friends in the North and spend as much time there as I can. If you, like I have, attended just one funeral of someone killed, be he Protestant or Catholic, because of the violence, you'd never give money to any organization that promotes the killing of Irish people. Americans have got to realize that the problems in the North concern cultures, identities. Economically, both Protestants and Catholics are badly off. A country so much at war spends its money on security."

John Hume and his Social Democrat and Labor Party constituents in Ulster are Harney's hope for future harmony. "I greatly admire their dedication. If Irish Americans want to give money, they should contribute to Hume's party. They are trying to bring people together, not pull them apart. Unfortunately, the voice of moderation isn't always heard, especially at election time."

What impressed Harney most in her

recent visit to this country (she spent a summer here as a college student) was the "great love and concern Irish Americans have for my small country. That is what I'll never forget."



Joan Hausrath

### Julia O'Faolain

The daughter of writers (father Sean O'Faolain is one of Ireland's greatest authors of fiction; mother Eileen is a collector and reteller of Irish sagas and folktales), wife of Lauro Martines who has several books on the Renaissance, Julia O'Faolain herself has many books of fiction and translations to her credit, as well as a co-edition, with her husband, of *Not in God's Image: Women in History from the Greeks to the Victorians* (1972). Her most recent novels have had American editions this year: *The Obedient Wife*, and *The Irish Signorina*. At noon on the day of her recent New York reading, I met O'Faolain for lunch and we talked.

Julia O'Faolain, like her very famous father, has a prestigious academic background that includes degrees from University College, Dublin, and graduate work in Italy and at the Sorbonne. Fluent in both French and Italian, she was a translator for the Council of Europe. At this time, she married Lauro Martines, who now occupies the Renaissance Chair at UCLA. After "commuting" several years between Florence and Los Angeles, they have given up their Florence residence for



one in London.

For her first publisher, Faber & Faber, O'Faolain supplied the following biographical information:

*I was brought up in Ireland where my father is perhaps the least Bohemian of native Irish writers. Full-blooded Bohemians used to visit, however, and his demesles with the Irish Establishment produced an obscure -- since I never understood them -- sense of alienation. I had the usual local education: Sacred Heart Convent and University College, Dublin. The sensuous impact of France -- the good Catholic Savoyard family with whom I spent summers, lived with a tension of the senses that was half D'Annunzio, half Strindberg -- and the peculiarly formal French approach to life, were exciting. I met and married my husband in Florence. My son's latest report from the local French lycee sums him up as "bavard et dissipe." I was stricken. As the Irish say, "It's not off the stones he licked it."*

That bookcover bio succinctly sums up many of the themes that run through O'Faolain's fiction: parochialism vs. intellectualism, suburban/academic life in Ireland, on the Continent, and this country's West Coast. But what it doesn't predict is her prolific work that has earned her several literary prizes. Ten years after her novel on convent life in 6th century Gaul, she is at work on a novel set in the time of the break up of the Papal States and Pope Pius IX. It follows *The Irish Signorina*, for as she put it, "One wants to write a light novel before a serious one." Fascinated by "the parallels then and now in the Vatican," she "wants to break the back of it [the current novel on the papal states] as soon as possible. That was Ireland's moment...the Irish Brigade went to Rome to fight for Pius IX [the longest reigning pope] and that ungrateful pope, to a British diplomat, called them disorganized and dirty."

When asked why her most recent books tend to be less Irish in subject, O'Faolain, who frequently visits her parents in Dublin, replied, "I hope to find Irish subjects but I don't. I haven't used that much of my childhood in Ireland because my father used so much. I'm afraid of copying it. 'You never know if it's yours, is our family

joke.' Copyright!"

O'Faolain believes "that writing against the grain is good discipline. When you get yourself a plot, keep it tight. Keep the story going." Admittedly "not terribly political," she has, however, used many of Ireland's past and present political predicaments as both flashbacks and background in her stories and novels. In "Daughters of Passion, my Hunger Strike story" her heroine, Maggie, "knew the system didn't change just because some little Irish terrorist wouldn't eat her dinner."

*She also knew the English had enough troubles without worrying about the bloody Irish. Always whining and drinking, or else refusing to eat and blaming the poor old U.K. for all their woes. They had their own country now but did that stop them? Not on your nelly, it didn't. They were still over here in their droves taking work when a lot of English people couldn't find it. Rowdy, noisy. Oh, forget it. When you saw all the black and brown faces, you almost came to like the paddies if only they'd stop making a nuisance of themselves."*

*No Country for Young Men*, her 1980 novel concerning Ireland's troubled past and present, is O'Faolain's most Irish work in both subject and substance. The novel concerns four generations of the Clancy family, bound together by Republicanism and rebellion. Its primary characters are an almost octogenarian nun who remembers too much and an almost middle-aged housewife seeking refuge from both marriage and Ireland. Sample this vintage O'Faolain (it smacks of Sean!) on the subject of women:

*The rules had changed and young women nowadays could afford to be adventurous. The yardstick for judging them was less harsh...The tide of permissiveness which lapped the shores of Ireland, like an oil slick riding the warm Gulf stream, was safely navigable only as long as you kept off the coastal rocks. Laws here had not changed, nor people's attitudes underneath. Not for women. Like a group riding the last step of an escalator, Ireland moved with the times but stayed in the rear.*

I would be remiss if I didn't mention *Melancholy Baby*, O'Faolain's 1978 collection of nine stories (all Irish!), published in Dublin by Poolpeg Press. All of the taboo subjects surface: t.b., celibacy, mixed or shotgun marriages. On the subject of the latter, we meet P.J. Phennessey, 29, a recent M.D. and expectant father intent on being a cruise doctor on the South Seas rather than the husband of Philomena who put him through medical school where he was told by Surgeon Madison in Obstetrics that "legalized rape described the first night of Irish marriages."

And in her most recent novel, *The Irish Signorina*, O'Faolain's heroine Anne, on the subject of her mother, observed that "she had the Irish preference for breaking rather than changing laws, loved things simultaneously to be and not to be, and had, her daughter thought, come to see obstacles to happiness as part of the happiness."

Now with writers like Julia O'Faolain, senators like Mary Harney, and activists for human rights like Mairead Corrigan Maguire, is it any wonder that Mother Machree is off her rocker and probably won't be in when the Kathleenes, the Danny Boys, and Molly Malones come home? And that, as both Mother and Molly would say, "is a whole new kettle of fish."



Bill Berry

Maureen Connelly teaches Contemporary Irish Writers at BSC, a course she first taught at Boston State in the late 60's. A past president of the Eire Society and the first woman director of the Charitable Irish, she was the founding editor of the Boston Irish Echo and is a frequent contributor to Irish publications. Her grandmother, she suspects, was the original Mother Machree.